

Testimony for Raised Bill No. 7366

An Act Concerning School Based Health Clinics and Community Health Centers

I want to thank the Committee on Public Health for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of the recommendation for a substantial increase in funding for support of school based health centers in Connecticut. My name is Pamela Clark. I am the Clinic Nursing and Support Supervisor of Hartford Public Schools.

Hartford Public Schools (HPS) operates eight School Based Health Centers offering a full range of comprehensive medical, mental and dental services. Last school year we provided a total of 26,000 medical visits to 8,000 clinic enrolled students. The Clinic Program served a third of the 24,000 students attending the Hartford Public Schools.

Hartford's children are among the poorest in the nation. According to the census of year 2000 only 5 cities in the US have higher poverty rates for children than Hartford. These children face severe life challenges with major threats to their health and well being and often grow up with little hope and poor self-esteem. In addition, approximately 30% of our district students and families have no insurance or are underinsured. The School Based Health Clinics offer access to critically needed health care. Clinic Staff assist students and their families in identifying available medical and psychosocial care in the community. Staff also actively enrolls students into HUSKY programs.

Schools Based health centers offer primary, preventative, and acute care in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The following medical care is provided by the staff at the five schools: physical assessments, risk assessments, development of health care plans, screening for health problems, immunizations; diagnosis and treatment per approved protocols consistent with the American Association of Pediatrics; pregnancy diagnosis, gynecological exams and STD screening, prenatal and post-partum referral and follow-up; and family planning counseling and referral. The SBHCs also deliver psychosocial care consistent with NASW standards for clinical social work and standards for social workers in a health care setting as set out in the NASW Code of Ethics. The SBHCs use DSM-IV diagnoses including crisis intervention; individual, group and family counseling; assessment and treatment; support and discussion groups; and, consultation to parents and staff. The dental program provides full service treatment at ten elementary school offices. Dental services include screening and referral, prophylaxis, fluoride treatments, x-rays, sealants, restorations, extractions, pulpotomies, root canals and minor surgery. Additionally, oral hygiene instruction is provided at all sites regularly to treated students. All SBHC medical, dental and mental health services are provided with parental consent.

Staffing consists of Nurse Practitioners, registered nurses and mental health clinicians all having experience and training in the care of children and adolescents. We offer extensive services in the area of reproductive health care. Our providers at each site promote a positive and trusting rapport among students and families.

The presence of the school based health centers greatly contributes to a decrease in student absenteeism and emergency room visits because we are there to provide the emergent and acute care needed to keep the student in school. After parental consent has been obtained the parent does not have to accompany the child at time of visit thereby offering easy access for families.

Though Hartford is home to several hospitals, community health centers and mental health organizations, there are many barriers to their use. Similarly, other community organizations and associations exist, but given their reliance on grant funds and the tremendous needs of our youth, additional services are always in demand.

We have expanded our program over the past few years by adding three new sites to the original five sites partially funded through DPH. These new sites have been funded entirely through HPS general funds and insurance reimbursements. Currently Hartford's SBHCs funding sources are: 44% from insurance reimbursements, 38% from the HPS general budget and 18% from a DPH grant. Maintenance of the school-based clinic program remains a struggle. The potential availability of funding as proposed under this bill would increase our ability to expand needed medical services to children in Hartford.

Sincerely,

Pamela J. Clark, RN, MPH